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News from Baylor College of Medicine

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New blood test identifies those at risk for coronary events

HOUSTON--(April 2, 2003)--A new blood test can help physicians predict coronary episodes in patients not previously considered at risk, according to late breaking data presented today at the American College of Cardiology's 52nd Annual Scientific Session in Chicago.

Dr. Christie Ballantyne, director of the Center for Cardiovascular Disease Prevention at Baylor College of Medicine and the Methodist DeBakey Heart Center in Houston, reported that both lipoprotein-associated phospholipase A2 (Lp-PLA2) and high-sensitivity C-Reactive Protein (hs-CRP) are independently associated with the incidence of coronary heart disease.

"Unfortunately, many people with 'normal' LDL cholesterol (or bad cholesterol) are not targeted for preventative therapies because they are not considered at risk for heart disease," said Ballantyne. "However, we found that even if patients have normal LDL levels, they are at increased risk for heart disease if they have high levels of either CRP or Lp-PLA2."

From one-third to one-half of all coronary events occur in patients with low LDL (less than 130) and no evidence of other risk factors. These include elevated LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, a family history of premature heart disease, high blood pressure, smoking and diabetes.

"Based on these findings, this study is a valuable step in developing preventative strategies that may utilize blood tests for Lp-PLA2 and CRP to identify high-risk patients," he said.

The PLAC test is a simple blood test that measures Lp-PLA2. The PLAC test may help determine if an individual is at an increased risk for heart disease.

"The incidence of coronary heart disease, and the seriousness of coronary events, warrants new research into identifying new markers of the disease beyond traditional risk factors," said Ballantyne. "We believe that measuring levels of Lp-PLA2 may offer physicians an important new tool in better evaluating, and potentially treating, their patients."

Coronary heart disease ranks as the leading cause of death in the United States, affecting more than 12.9 million Americans. According to the American Heart Association, nearly half of all patients that experience coronary events, such as heart attacks, do not exhibit traditional risk factors such as smoking, obesity, high blood pressure or elevated LDL cholesterol.

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